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CHRONOLOGICAL OPERATIONAL NARRATIVE OF THE CUBAN CRISIS

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On the 18th, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) decided to deploy PHIBMAGLEX-62 and to hold the troops (RLT-3) and helicopters of the exercise's landing force, the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (4th MEB) on board ship and to retain at Roosevelt Roads the deployed air elements of the brigade, an attack and a fighter squadron.

Late on the 18th, the JCS directed the transfer of one well rounded company of a reinforced infantry battalion from Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC) to CINCLANT and its transport by Military Air Transport Service (MATS) aircraft to Guantanamo to reinforce the garrison. (The battalion designated by the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division (CG-1st MDiv) was the 1st

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On the 18th, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) decided to delay PHIBBRIGLEX-62 and to hold the troops (RLT-2) and helicopters of the exercise's landing force, the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (4th MEB) on board ship and to retain at Roosevelt Roads the deployed air elements of the brigade, an attack and a fighter squadron.

Late on the 18th, the JCS directed the transfer of operational control of a reinforced infantry battalion from Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC) to CINCLANT and its movement by Military Air Transport Service (MATS) aircraft to Guantanamo to reinforce the garrison. The battalion designated by the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division (CG 1stMarDiv) was the 2nd

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Battalion, 1st Marines reinforced as Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2/4. Eleven hours after BLT 2/4's commanding officer was briefed on his mission, the unit was ready to move from Camp Pendleton to El Toro to lift out. During the day, CINCLANT requested that the JCS also transfer to his command, from Pacific Fleet forces, a light antiaircraft missile (LAAM) battalion.

On the morning of the 19th, as BLT 2/4 stood by for its move from the West Coast to Guantanamo, CINCLANT directed a Marine general of his command to report to Commander, Naval Base, Guantanamo, not later than 20 October as Commanding General, Ground Forces. As plans for the buildup of forces at Guantanamo continued on the 19th, CG FMFLant sent a directive to the Commanding General, Marine Corps Supply Center, Albany, for immediate air shipment via MATS of combat rations and trioxane fuel to Guantanamo. Simultaneously, the Commander, Naval Ammunition Depot, Charleston, was requested to ship by air to Guantanamo ammunition earmarked for the 6th MEB. Continuing the requests for use of MATS aircraft, CINCLANT asked JCS approval for the airlift of a Marine aircraft group (MACG) to Key West. Plans had already been made to utilize the 2d Marine Aircraft Wing's (2d MAW) organic lift capability to transport an infantry battalion of the 2d MarDiv from Cherry Point to Guantanamo when directed. The JCS did not order this battalion's deployment until 21 October.

Continuing the actions of the 19th, the JCS agreed to CINCLANT's request for a LAAM battalion and directed the Commandant of the Marine Corps

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to designate such a unit for temporary deployment from Pacific to Atlantic Fleet control. CINCPAC was requested to transfer operational control of the designated unit, the 3d LAAM (Hawk) Battalion, to CINCLANT, with CINCLANT to arrange for MATS airlift from Twentynine Palms to Cherry Point.

In preparation for the possible use of Marine assault forces in the Cuban situation, the JCS also directed on the 18th that shipping be assembled on the West Coast to transport the 5th MEB from Camp Pendleton. On the East Coast CG FMFLant activated his Operational Control Center and prepared to embark the remainder of the 2d Marine Division.

The next day, 20 October, CINCLANT ordered a Marine attack squadron (VMA) to fly aboard the USS ENTERPRISE and to arrive no later than 21 October. The unit designated for this mission, which was executed as directed, was VMA-225 located at Cherry Point.

It was on 20 October also that the JCS warned the Commander in Chiefs that the state of tension with Cuba could lead to military action. CINCLANT responded to this warning with a request that the landings of the 4th MEB under PHIEBRIGLEX-62 be cancelled. On the West Coast, in the continuing pattern of readiness, the staff of the 5th MEB was activated at Camp Pendleton.

On the 21st, the JCS-directed airlift of a battalion of the 2dMarDiv to Guantanamo began. The division commander had designated the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, the division's alert battalion, to make the move. Before the first plane of the 2d MAW left Cherry Point with the men and equipment of 1/8 aboard, the deployment of BLT 2/1 via MATS aircraft started at El Toro.

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Both airlifts were completed late on the following day when the last plane closed Guantanamo. Included in this air movement by CINCLANT's orders was Headquarters, Regimental Landing Team 6 (RLT-6). This unit, which moved from Vieques to Guantanamo, was to have controlled umpire and aggressor activities during PHIBBRIGLEX-62. The exercise itself was suspended by JCS directive on the 21st.

At the same time, on 21 October, that the JCS directed CINCLANT to airlift a battalion of the 2dMarDiv to Guantanamo, they also directed him to land an afloat battalion at the Naval Base on the 22d. CINCLANT immediately ordered the Commander, Amphibious Forces, Atlantic Fleet to reinforce Guantanamo with a battalion embarked with the Caribbean Amphibious Squadron. On the 22d, BLT 2/2, an element of the 4th MEB, which was also the Caribbean ready battalion, landed at Guantanamo.

On the 21st, the JCS approved the MATS-supported airlift of a Marine aircraft group from Cherry Point to Key West. On the 22d, the designated group, MAG-14, began its deployment. The group reported to Commander in Chief, Air Forces, Atlantic, for operational control on 23 October, and early on the 24th, completed its movement from Cherry Point.

The embarkation of the 5th MEB, which was activated on the 22d, was directed by the JCS on the same date. CINCPAC immediately ordered Commander, Amphibious Forces, Pacific Fleet, to begin loading the Marine brigade on designated shipping. The brigade was to sail when directed and

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to pass to the operational control of CINCLANT on transit of the Panama Canal.

At the same time that the 5th MEB began loading out in California, all non-combatants at Guantanamo were evacuated from the threatened base. Approximately one-seventh of these evacuees were airlifted to Norfolk by planes of the 2d MAW which had transported Marines of 1/8 to Guantanamo.

On the 22d, CINCLANT advised the JCS that he considered it highly desirable that the 5th MEB be reconstituted to its original task organization. He also requested that the two VMA squadrons located at El Toro and earmarked for the 5th MEB be transferred in place to his operational control. Both requests were approved by the JCS on the 23d. In response to these decisions, CG 1stMarDiv, on the 23d, designated BLT 1/7 to replace 2/1 in the 5th MEB. On the 24th, VMA-121 and 223, the earmarked squadrons, were transferred to control of CINCLANT. The combat loading of the 5th MEB began on the 22d and continued over the next four days.

The II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF) was activated by CG FMFLant in response to CINCLANT directives on 23 October. The II MEF was the landing force command element for projected Cuban operations and consisted of Landing Group West (2dMarDiv (-)), Landing Group East (5th MEB), Landing Force Aviation (2d MAW (-)(Rein)) and other Force support and reserve groups.

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It was on 23 October also that the 3d LAAM Battalion began its airlift from George Air Force Base. The last MATS plane with battalion elements aboard reached Cherry Point late on the 25th. During the day, 25 October, one battery of the battalion with its full equipment was flown to Guantanamo in planes of the 2d MAW. This last deployment was made on order of CG FMFLant, issued on 24 October. Operational control of this battery was assigned to the headquarters of MAG-32, which had moved to Cuba on the 23d in order to control the activities of the two squadrons previously deployed to Roosevelt Roads under PHIBBRIGLEX-62 plans

On 25 October, the JCS directed CINCPAC to sail the 5th MEB as soon as possible, and on the 26th, the brigade commander reported to Commander, Amphibious Group 3, for operational control. The ships of the amphibious group with the brigade embarked sailed on the 26th and 27th, their ultimate destination the Caribbean, to join the forces standing by for a landing in Cuba.

On the 26th, as the first elements of the 5th MEB left the West Coast to join the II MEF, RLT-8 of the 2dMarDiv began embarking at Camp Lejeune. The three BLT's of RLT-8 sailed on successive days, 26, 27, and 28 October, to join units of the 4th MEB at sea as part of the Landing Group West of the II MEF. On the 30th, the Commanding General, 2dMarDiv, embarked aboard the Amphibious Command Ship MT. McKINLEY in his capacity as Commanding General, Landing Group West. The headquarters and equipment

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of the 4th MEB was absorbed by the landing group, and the 4th MEB was deactivated.

As the buildup of forces throughout the southeastern United States and the Caribbean continued in the latter part of October, the concentration of aircraft in southern Florida made the area particularly vulnerable. CINCLANT, on 27 October, directed COMAFLANT to rotate to home bases 15 per cent of Air Force and Marine aircraft in southern Florida. Pursuant to that order, VMA(AW)-122 returned to Beaufort on 27 October and assumed a 12-hour alert status for redeployment. Within 24 hours, however, the squadron had been recalled to Key West.

In the review of the status of the Marine forces committed in the Cuban crisis, CG FMFLANT, on 28 October, expressed concern to CINCLANT over the apparent shortage of 1st and 2d Resupply of aviation conventional ordnance. CINCLANT in his situation report of the same date confirmed the possible shortage and stated that replenishment of East Coast stocks might be necessary from West Coast resources.

The Marine forces committed and deployed in the Cuban crisis stood ready for action in the first days of November with little change in their status. The last major element of the II MEF, the 5th MEB, passed through the Panama Canal on 5-6 November and came under the operational control of CINCLANT. On the 7th, the amphibious group transporting the Marine brigade reassembled on the Atlantic side of the canal and sailed for a

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rendevous at sea with the remainder of the II MEF embarked elements

As the Marine expeditionary force assembled off the target area, CINCLANT ordered VMA-333 from Roosevelt Roads to Guantanamo to increase the base's defense capability. The move was ordered and effected on 6 November. By this time the number of Marines at the Naval Base was approximately 5,000.

On 7 November, CINCLANT and his principal component commanders (including CG FMFLant) met with the JCS to discuss the length of time forces could maintain the current alert posture, as well as the adequacy of forces assigned for proposed operations. The feasibility of scheduling a training exercise involving deployed forces was also discussed.

On 10 November, the 5th MEB, which was also Landing Group East, was designated II MEF Reserve. This action marked the peak deployment of the ground and air forces of the II MEF in the Cuban crisis.

On 12 November, one of the two West Coast squadrons earmarked for employment with the 5th MEB, VMA-121, was ordered by CINCLANT to deploy to Cecil Field, Florida, to replace a Navy carrier air group. The move was supported by organic 3d MAW aircraft and completed on the 14th, according to schedule.

Aside from this move of VMA-121, during the period 10-23 November, the Marine units employed in the Cuban crisis were concerned primarily with maintaining their readiness posture. Landing Group West divided its forces

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into three groups which rotated in using training sites off the coasts of North Carolina and Florida. In like manner, Landing Group East divided its forces into two groups, one of which trained at Vieques while the other remained afloat. Marine elements of Guantanamo's air and ground defense forces steadily improved their positions during this same period, while units of MAG-14 at Key West took part in the aerial reconnaissance of Cuba and made preparations to support any landings there.

On 20 November, in the light of the President's lifting of the Cuban quarantine, the JCS advised CINCLANT that instructions regarding disposition of amphibious forces would be forthcoming. Plans were developed for the phased withdrawal of these forces to take effect when directed by the JCS. On 28 November, the JCS directed CINCLANT to reduce the readiness posture of his forces to the pre-Cuba status.

On the 29th, CINCLANT directed CINCPACFLT to return all Marine forces under his operational control to CG FMFLANT. On the same date, CINCLANT issued directives to other concerned component commanders for the return of deployed units of the II MEF to home bases. Initially, the units of the 2dMarDiv deployed to Guantanamo would remain at the Naval Base.

The first deployed units to return to normal operations were BLT's 3/6 and 2/8 of the 2dMarDiv which were training at Onslow Beach (part of Camp Lejeune) on 29 November. They immediately began debarkation

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operations. The remainder of the 2dMarDiv's afloat elements returned to Camp Lejeune during the period 1-2 December.

The first deployed air unit to return to its home base was VMA-121. Directed to move from Cecil Field on 29 November, VMA-121 completed its redeployment to El Toro on 1 December. On the 2d, MAG-14 returned to home stations of Beaufort and Cherry Point. Sixteen of VMA(AW)-122 F8U's remained at Key West to support reconnaissance missions. Also on 2 December, MAG-26, the helicopter group which had been afloat as part of the 4th MEB and then Landing Group West, arrived and debarked at New River. On 5 December, VMA-225 returned to Cherry Point from the USS ENTERPRISE.

On 6 December, CG FMFLant deactivated the II MEF and all units returned to normal operational control as directed. In order to permit orderly resumption of the transplacement program, the return of BLT 1/7 of the 5th MEB was expedited. The remainder of the brigade, accompanied by 2/1 which loaded at Guantanamo on 2 December, sailed for California in trace of the first BLT's ship. BLT 1/7 reached the West Coast on 10 December, and the remaining major units of the brigade had arrived and started debarking by the 15th. On 17 December, the Commanding General, 5th MEB, dissolved the task organization.

The last ground units of the reinforcements sent to Guantanamo during the crisis, Headquarters RLT-6, BLT 2/2 and BLT 1/8 returned to Camp Lejeune by sea and air during the period 5-6 December. One rifle company

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of 1/8 was retained at Guantanamo to augment the garrison. Some personnel of Battery C of the 3d LAAM Battalion were flown back to Cherry Point on the 7th, and the initial steps were taken to effect a permanent change of station which would bring the battalion under operational control of CG FMFLant.

The Marine aviation units deployed in the Caribbean as a result of the Cuban crisis returned to the states during this same period. VMF(AW)-115 flew to Guantanamo on 3-4 December to replace VMF-333 as the Caribbean alert squadron. VMF-333 returned to Beaufort during the same two days. On the 8th, VMA-331 flew to Beaufort from Roosevelt Roads, and on the 12th, Headquarters of MAG-32 returned to the same base.

The Commanding General, Ground Defense Forces, Guantanamo, and his provisional staff left the Naval Base on 12 December to return to Norfolk, thus marking the end of the Marine Corps' emergency deployments in the Cuban objective area.

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PART VIII  
AVIATION

1. Significant Deputy Chief of Staff (Air) actions occurred in the following areas:

a. Marine Aviation support to operations in Eastern Cuba would have been marginal due to the unavailability of an airfield within 200 miles range. CINCLANT contingency plans for Cuba assumed the availability of the airfield on Mayaguana Island and negotiations were underway with the British for the use of this airfield where it was planned to locate a Marine Aircraft Group. However, after the crisis developed the decision was made not to use this field, apparently because of possible political complications. During the "quarantine" period it is understood that the MAAG, Dominican Republic had arranged for the use of an airfield for emergency situations. Marine land-based aircraft were operating from Roosevelt Roads which, because of the ranges involved, necessitated bomb stations being used for external fuel which in turn reduced the ordnance load. Further, Ramey Field was planned to be used as a staging base for A4D aircraft, if required, with four FV refueling aircraft stationed at Ramey for refueling the attack aircraft either going to or retiring from the target area.

b. In support of CINCLANT, Op Plans 312 and 316, the facility at Naval Air Station, Key West for MAG-14 was ideal as to the proximity to the target area. The billeting for the first two weeks was unsatisfactory

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due to extremely over crowded conditions and the state of repair of the quarters. This was alleviated by moving the officers and senior enlisted personnel into adjacent commercial quarters. It is pointed out that Arm and Air Force units billeted all personnel in local hotels and motels from the outset.

c. MAG-14 devised approach and attack tactics against the Cuban Surface-to-Air Missile Sites which afforded minimum exposure (less than six seconds) of the A4D aircraft to the SAM tracking radars. The run-in was at minimum altitude to a known IP (Initial Point) where a pop-up maneuver was executed at high G to an altitude of about 5000 feet, then a half roll and pull through in the inverted position where the pilot visually sighted the target, followed by a roll-out and glide bomb run on the SAM Site.

d. The major logistic problem was the availability of all types of CLASS VA support. This was recognized at all levels of command and requires continuing action at the Washington level to improve the availability of initial mount-out and resupply stocks.

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